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NAHMS Beef '97: A Response to Customer Requests

The USDA's National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) went to their customers to characterize critical information gaps for the beef cow-calf industry. NAHMS was created to fill the information needs of producers, veterinarians, researchers, educators, and policy makers in animal industries.

Staff prepared for a 1997 study of the United States beef cow-calf industry using a variety of methods to solicit input from customers including focus groups, the internet, and personal interviews. In addition, NAHMS actively monitored beef literature to stay up to date on the industry's key issues.

These needs assessment activities helped prioritize the following objectives for the Beef '97 study:

1. Support global trade by estimating the prevalence of important animal pathogens.

Growth in export markets has been advantageous for the beef industry, especially in light of recent domestic developments relative to beef oversupply and high feed costs. With the adoption of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the United States can and will be asked to demonstrate the health of our cattle herd in a scientifically credible manner to assure open markets for animals and products. The NAHMS Beef '97 national study will strive to estimate the regional prevalence of Johne's

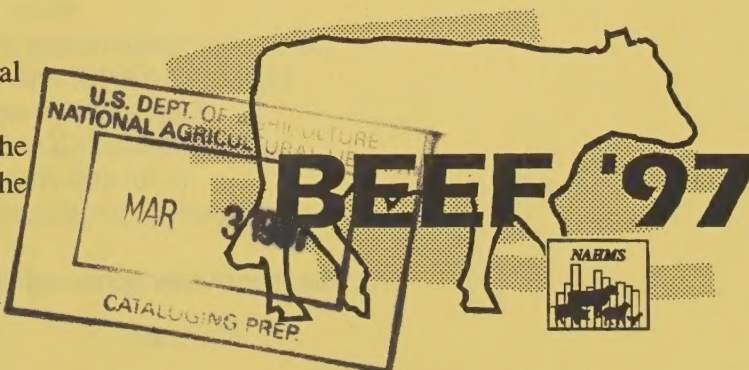
disease and Bovine Leukosis Virus (BLV) infection, two diseases of interest to our trading partners.

2. Support efforts by the industry to supply quality products.

Beef industry efforts to improve product quality continue. The most recent National Beef Quality Audit identified beef quality problems valued at \$137.82 per steer or heifer slaughtered. The Beef '97 study represents another opportunity to help the industry measure related production processes. Data will be collected on injection practices, facility management, and other routine management practices that impact end product quality.

3. Support the efforts of APHIS to achieve a high level of emergency preparedness.

The mission of the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), to protect American agriculture, includes the need to deal with emerging and emergency disease situations to minimize impacts on the national cattle herd. In the event of an emergency, such as the incursion of a foreign animal disease like foot and mouth disease, APHIS will need to implement sound policy decisions to assess the risk of disease



spread and potential impacts. Beef '97 will contribute information on farm and ranch management practices such as how new animals are introduced into existing herds and what vaccinations are routinely used. This information will be important to assess the risk of disease spread and predict high risk locations.

4. Describe trends in animal health.

By monitoring our beef population health, NAHMS can provide an early warning system for new or emerging disease threats and enhance our abilities to control them. Beef '97 is an opportunity to take another snapshot of animal disease occurrence. By comparing these data from those from 1993, changes in levels of disease or geographic patterns of disease may be evident signaling the need for closer investigation.

5. Support existing disease control efforts.

APHIS has been successful in working toward control, and in some cases eradication, of cattle diseases. Beef '97 will collect additional information that will have a bearing on policy decisions about how to complete eradication efforts, what to do after eradication efforts are complete, or how to initiate future control programs that might be requested by the industry.

6. Support efforts of the beef industry to become more efficient.

Though growth in export markets has helped to boost prices for U.S. beef, potential for this growth is finite. Ultimately global competitors will force our producers to become ever more efficient in production. Relatively few U.S. producers have adopted many technologies developed to improve reproduction, feeding, and growth efficiency. Beef

'97 will collect data on why producers are not using these technologies to provide educators with assessments they need to design programs to influence producers' acceptance of proven efficiency tools.

To meet these broad objectives, NAHMS is designing a series of activities that will help to fill the information gaps. In addition to a large national study of randomly selected cow-calf operations, other activities are planned, such as further analyses of existing databases from other federal agencies, a survey of veterinarians, and collaboration with universities on local initiatives.

As with similar past NAHMS studies, the Beef '97 national study will rely on voluntary participation of producers, this time from cow/calf producers in leading cow-calf states.

In January 1997, the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) will select and contact this sample of producers. If the producer consents to participate in the study, a questionnaire will be completed and NASS will turn the producer's name over to NAHMS for follow-up contacts. Over the course of 1997, APHIS veterinarians will administer another questionnaire and offer the producer options of participating in any of a series of biological sample collection activities to gather the disease prevalence information previously mentioned and allow assessments of management practices.

Data from individual producers are *strictly confidential*, but summary results from all operations will be distributed back to the individual participating producers and shared with others to meet some of the existing needs for scientifically sound information on key issues.

For more information of the NAHMS Beef '97 study, contact:

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